peak in the second half of May in addition to that expected in July. I took this to be a reflection on my somewhat erratic trapping pattern but to check, I analysed my records of *Sphinx ligustri* L. (163 records) and *Deilephila elpenor* L. (320 records), two other locally common sphingids that appear frequently in the trap with *populi*. These are also shown and indicate the expected type of distribution. This, surely, eliminates any sampling effects. My curiosity aroused, I re-examined West's and Spalding's data. The former show a minor late May peak in four of the ten years where full data are available (1987, 1989, 1991 and 1992), whilst Spalding's figure shows a somewhat later, minor peak in the first week of June. These observations are obviously inconclusive but suggest that this moth, in some years and in some parts of the country at least, exhibits an unusual pattern of emergence. Perhaps other readers will examine their own records to see how widespread this phenomenon is, or suggest an explanation.– R.W. BOGUE, Kingston House, Tuckermarsh, Bere Alston, Devon PL20 7HB.

Scarcity of Vanessid butterflies

I refer to the observation "The scarcity of Vanessid butterflies" by C.J. Smith (*Ent. Rec. J. Var.* **107**: 146), who I note is another resident of Sale, and who in particular makes a point that in a local sports field hostplant-habitat of *Aglais urticae* (Linn.) and *Inachis io* (Linn.) has been destroyed.

Close to my home is another sports field, Crossford, where I have done some studies on these species. It is owned by the local authority and is in the Mersey Valley. The eastern section of the field is on a slightly higher level than the western and the two sections are separated by a shallow north-south drain (SJ792930/1) in which, in spite of the grass either side being regularly mown, extensive beds of nettles are normally allowed to grow unhindered. Forming a west-facing bank, in early spring the drain receives the full rays of the afternoon sun, and forms a microclimate considerably warmer than the surrounding area. As a result, every year one or both of these butterfly species congregate here post-hibernation, sometimes in considerable numbers. It is generally accepted that *A. urticae* and *I. io* are highly mobile and do not form permanent breeding populations restricted to a small area, therefore I suggest that each year individuals moving through the Mersey Valley, probably from some distance, are able to single out this small site from the surrounding environment because of its combination of suitable features (chemical/ olfactory cues from the nettles; aspect; insolation level).

I find that this concentration of the butterflies occurs only in the spring – later in the year, when the ambient temperature in the Valley is higher, the need for the butterflies to seek out the warmest spots is less and they are more generally distributed.

Normally the spring sighting of adults is followed by the appearance of larvae on the nettles, though this does not occur every year – sometimes when *A. urticae* imagines have been abundant no larvae have been seen, and

sometimes only *I. io*. This year 1995, however, although in the whole of this area *A. urticae* numbers post-hibernation were very much down on previous years (I only had a couple of sightings in the sports field) and I was unable to locate any broods of larvae elsewhere in the neighbourhood, a very fine brood appeared and fed to pupation on these nettles.

I would suggest that the "scarcity" of the Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell in this area, which Smith mentions as having occurred in recent years, is due more to cyclical fluctuations caused by climatic variations and/or parasite numbers than to habitat destruction; numerous suitable sites exist in the Mersey Valley. In my experience, *I. io* has considerably increased in the last decade, and although *A. urticae* has been quite scarce at times especially this last year, at other times, notably 1989-91, it has been very numerous and much more so than in, say, 1986-7. I would however agree with Smith that there is no room for complacency and that habitat destruction does pose a considerable threat to even the most familiar butterflies: there was a recent plan to remove Crossford sports field from the "green-belt" and offer it for private development, and along with many other sites in the Mersey Valley it stands to be considerably damaged if current proposals to widen the M63 motorway, which runs behind it, go ahead.– PETER B. HARDY, 10 Dudley Road, Sale, Cheshire.

ERIC BRADFORD

We were saddened to hear, as we went to press, of the tragic death of Eric Bradford in a road accident, on 12th August 1995. Although best known as a microlepidopterist, Eric had a deep interest in all forms of wildlife and its conservation – his large garden was converted into a wildlife haven, and he purchased some woodland within the Blean complex in Kent as a reserve. A skilled artist, his paintings of lepidoptera were much admired, and more recently he published a series of papers jointly with the editor of the *Record* illustrating the British Gelechiidae. It gave him considerable pleasure to paint some of his illustrations with brushes acquired from the late Stanley Jacobs, also a well known illustrator. He was amongst the most knowledgeable microlepidopterists in the country, but never considered himself an "expert", even though this was deserved in some areas. Eric was a generous man, freely giving his advice, time and friendship to those who shared his interests, and he will be sorely missed by those who knew him.

Paul Sokoloff